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SUBJECT: SENATORS INOUYE AND STEVENS RECEIVE WARM WELCOME  
FROM THE PHILIPPINES

REF: A. MANILA 123

1B. MANILA 82

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: During a busy and productive January 17-19 visit to the Philippines, Sen. Daniel K. Inouye (D-HI) and Sen. Ted Stevens (R-AK) met with Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, who decorated Sen. Stevens with the Order of the Golden Heart (an award previously bestowed on Sen. Inouye). A January 17 reception at the Embassy in the senators' honor attracted an impressive cross-section of Philippine society, including Philippine veterans of the struggle for Bataan and Corregidor. On January 18, a trip to Zamboanga afforded the senators the opportunity to review a USAID-sponsored project to equip high school students with computers, and a chance to visit U.S. troops, including Hawaii National Guard personnel, of the Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines (JSOTF-P). END SUMMARY.

12. (U) Embassy Manila welcomed Sen. Daniel K. Inouye (D-HI) and Sen. Ted Stevens (R-AK) back to the Philippines for a January 17-19 visit. The warm welcome the Filipinos offered the senators reflected Inouye's and Stevens' longstanding ties and many previous visits over decades. Senator Inouye is especially remembered for his role in funding by the U.S. Congress of humanitarian relief assistance for Philippine victims of the 2006 super-typhoons Milenyo and Reming, as well as being viewed as a champion of Philippine World War II veterans by sponsoring the Veterans Equity Act to expand benefits to Filipino soldiers who fought alongside American forces in the Pacific. Senator Stevens is likewise well-known in the Philippines as a leading advocate for strengthening Philippine-U.S. bilateral defense cooperation, and for his emphasis on the importance of U.S. support for the Philippines in its efforts as a frontline ally in the global fight against terrorism.

13. (U) Shortly after their January 17 arrival from South Korea, codel Inouye joined the Ambassador and DCM for a private, hour-long meeting with Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo at Malacanang Palace. President Arroyo presented Senator Stevens with the Order of the Golden Heart with the Rank of Grand Cross, in recognition of Sen. Stevens' support of Philippine veterans in their fight for equality, and for having rendered distinguished service and assistance in the improvement of the conditions of the Filipino people. Senator Inouye had received this honor during an August 2006 visit, in recognition of his leadership role with the Veterans Equity Act. The Senators subsequently attended a reception in their honor in the historic Chancery Ballroom; the gala event was attended by such leaders as Secretary of Defense Gilberto Teodoro, House Speaker Jose De Venecia, Presidential Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita, Father James Reuter, and a host of World War II veterans, including the surviving defenders of Bataan and Corregidor.

¶4. (U) Codel Inouye traveled January 18 to Zamboanga City in Mindanao, stopping first at the high school department of the Zamboanga State College of Marine Sciences and Technology (ZSCMST) to recognize a computer center opened with USAID support as a partnership project of the Computer Literacy and Internet Connectivity (CLIC) program. Passing rows of schoolchildren waving American and Filipino flags, the senators entered a gymnasium packed with nearly 2,000 cheering students. The Ambassador thanked the crowd for the cooperative spirit the school demonstrated, which she said reflected the positive attitude spreading throughout Mindanao. The Ambassador introduced the senators, who praised the local community for its interfaith tolerance, and thanked generations of Filipinos for supporting the struggle for freedom from World War II to the present. Zamboanga Mayor Celso Lobregat then welcomed the senators, heaping praise on the U.S. contributions to the Philippines.

¶5. (SBU) The senators then traveled to Camp Navarro, where the Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines (JSOTF-P) is headquartered. Ambassador and JSTOF-P Commander introduced the senators to Philippine Armed Forces Lt. Gen. Nelson Allaga, Commander of Western Mindanao Command, and his top staff. The senators lunched in the mess hall with U.S. troops, together with Ambassador and USAID Mission Director. Senator Inouye talked with nearly a dozen Hawaii National Guard troops, and Senator Stevens conferred with U.S. troops from Alaska and visiting Philippine military officers and troops. The JSOTF-P Commander, who had briefed the senators on military and counter-terrorism issues on the flight down to Zamboanga, led a roundtable discussion on these and other topics with the senators, Ambassador, USAID staff, and key JSOTF-P staff after lunch.

MANILA 00000292 002 OF 002

¶6. (U) Codel Inouye did not have the opportunity to clear this cable before departing post.

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